



# Arundhati Roy

## Biography

Arundhati Roy was born on November 24, 1961, in Shillong Meghalaya, in Bengal, North Eastern India. Her father was a Hindu tea planter, and her mother was a Christian teacher and social activist. Roy began her education at “Corpus Christi,” a school founded by her mother in Aymam, India. This school was very informal. As a result, Roy developed a way of thinking and writing that differed from those educated at more formal schools. In other words, Roy learned to think for herself. From the beginning of her education, Roy wanted to be a writer. It was her childhood dream.

She demonstrated her independence at the early age of sixteen, leaving her home to live on her own in a small hut with a tin roof. She survived for seven years by selling empty beer bottles for income. She observed the effects of Christianity, Marxism, Hinduism, and Islam in India, which shaped her attitudes and beliefs. Eventually she grew tired of this poverty-stricken life and decided to enter the Delhi School of Architecture. There, she met her first husband, Gerard Da Cunha. While they were married the couple decided to put their degrees aside and do something simple. The two embarked to Goa on the coast of India where they made and sold cakes to tourists for seven months. But Arundhati lost interest in this lifestyle, ending their marriage within four years.

Roy found a job with the National Institute of Urban Affairs where she met her future husband commuting on bicycle, a film director Pradeep Krishen. At the beginning of their relationship, Arundhati received a scholarship to study the restoration of monuments in Italy. She began to realize her unique writing abilities in Italy. Upon her return to India, Roy teamed up with her husband to write a screenplay for a television series. Unfortunately, the idea failed, but she continued to write more screenplays that resulted in several films including *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* and *Electric Moon*.



### Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1961
- \* Indian novelist and activist
- \* Her only novel is *The God of Small Things*

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Beginning with her critique of the film *Bandit Queen*, which turned into a lawsuit, her work has been controversial from the start. Following the lawsuit, she began to concentrate on her writing. Eventually this practice became *The God of Small Things*. This novel proved to be a success as it was published in nineteen countries and sixteen languages. She was compared to Charles Dickens and William Faulkner for the way she deals with the issues of race, class, and society. She was the first Indian writer to receive the Booker Prize, which is the most prestigious literary award in England.

Roy learned to live and think independently from her experiences. She is determined to do and say what she wants, even if her opinion goes against the social norm. To this day, she continues to voice her opinion as a social activist, writing about current events in essay form. Roy is known for her anti-war activist opinions, and she expresses them bravely in her numerous published works and speeches.

### **“The Algebra of Infinite Justice”:**

Arundhati Roy exercises her knowledge of the United States government and war in Middle Eastern countries in her essay “The Algebra of Infinite Justice” in *Power Politics*. She analyzes the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon from many angles and brings to life a new understanding of reality for American readers.

Roy questions the evidence in political speeches and documents in order to argue her view of America’s true purpose for going to war. She asks, if America’s enemies “hate our freedoms” (stated by President Bush in his September 20th address to the US Congress), then why were the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, rather than the Statue of Liberty, the chosen targets? She says the World Trade Center and Pentagon are “symbols of America’s economic and military dominance,” not symbols of our freedom.

Roy discusses terrorism and the US government’s route against it. She criticizes President Bush for his unattainable goal to “rid the world of evil-doers.” One of the most influential quotes in the essay is that “terrorism is the symptom, not the disease.”



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### **“Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin”:**

Roy presents an original voice in her essay “Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin” in *Power Politics*. She uses a character in European folklore to create an image of a power-hungry creature. In the story of Rumpelstiltskin, a young woman is faced with the impossible task of spinning straw into gold and told that death awaits her should she not complete it. She receives help from a strange little man on three different occasions, and, in exchange for his help, he asks for the first child she bears. Lacking any other option to save her life, she agrees; however, it isn’t until that child is born that she remembers the promise she made to the gnome. As she pleads with him, he tells her that she can keep the child if she can do one thing: guess his name.

This little man is Rumpelstiltskin, and he has returned in Arundhati Roy’s portrayal of world politics. Roy describes him as the powerful, pitiless king like no one has known before-- the image of the elite nation, the one that corners the victims into promising something they cannot give. The young woman stands for India, a victim with strikingly few options. From this perspective, Roy continues to address the major problems in the controversy of the public water supply to Third World nations, the issue of poverty in the world’s economic and social structure, and the fight for basic human rights on multiple fronts throughout the world. Roy uses her bold writing style to speak her mind on the injustices and deficiencies of the politics of the world. Using the foreknowledge of the strange little gnome, she shows that the political forces in the world are mocking the ones they have power over as the ‘Rumpelstiltskins’ demand the ‘just reward’ that the victims were forced to give but are now unable to provide. She argues that political and economic arrangements between the ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds are in dire need of revision.



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